

# Influenza Fact Sheet

## **What is influenza?**

Influenza (flu) is a very contagious viral infection of the nose, throat, bronchial tubes, and lungs. There are two main types of influenza virus: A and B. Each type includes many different strains which tend to change each year.

## **What is the “stomach flu”?**

The term "stomach flu" is used to describe illnesses with nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. These symptoms can be caused by many different viruses, bacteria, or even parasites. While vomiting, diarrhea, and being nauseous or "sick to your stomach" can sometimes be related to the flu – particularly in children – these problems are rarely the main symptoms of influenza. Influenza is a specific respiratory disease, and the term “the flu” is sometimes used to describe an illness not caused by the influenza virus.

## **What are the symptoms of influenza?**

Typical symptoms of influenza include fever, chills, muscle aches, headache, stuffy or runny nose, cough sore throat and general weakness. These symptoms usually appear one to five days after a person is exposed to the virus.

## **How is influenza transmitted?**

Influenza is spread through contact with droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person during coughing and sneezing.

## **When and how long is a person able to spread influenza?**

The contagious period varies, but probably begins the day before symptoms appear and lasts for about a week.

## **Can influenza be dangerous?**

Yes. Although most people recover from the disease within one week, some have life-threatening complications such as pneumonia and may need to be hospitalized.

## **Can influenza be prevented?**

Yes. People should practice "respiratory etiquette" to reduce the spread of respiratory diseases.

Here are some simple steps to keep yourself and others from getting sick:

- Stay away from other people when you are sick
- Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when you cough or sneeze then throw the tissue away
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds

In addition to these steps, getting a flu shot is an excellent way to prevent influenza. Because the types and strains of viruses that cause influenza change often, an influenza vaccination should be received every year. Some people who have been exposed to influenza may be prescribed an anti-viral medication to prevent or reduce the severity of illness.

## **Who should be vaccinated?**

For more information on who should be vaccinated, visit the [CDC Influenza web site](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.html).

**How is influenza treated?**

When taken within two days of illness onset, prescription anti-viral drugs can reduce the duration of uncomplicated influenza. There are four licensed anti-viral drugs available in the United States: amantadine and rimantadine for treatment and prevention of type A influenza, and oseltamivir and zanamivir for treatment of types A and B influenza. Oseltamivir is currently the only anti-viral drug approved for both treatment and prevention of types A and B influenza.

**Where can I get more information?**

- Private health care providers
- Local public health departments
- Community health centers, and
- The Utah Department of Health, Office of Epidemiology 801-538-6191.

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